**Projects in Fall, 2009**

1. **Kindle**

(May) I think Kindle appeals to readers because of the following reasons:

* We can choose the font size. Sometimes we feel the words in a book are too small, especially when we are tired. At that time, if we are using kindle, we can use the larger font size.
* There is a dictionary available. We can get the meaning of a word very quickly.
* Kindle can read to us through a tiny speaker. When we are tired we can listen to the book.
* Kindle has wireless connection. Books can be downloaded very quickly and kindle can hold over 1500 books.
* When we travel, we don’t have to carry 3 or 4 heavy books with us. But on the other hand, how many people have the vocation that provides enough time to read a whole book?
* I’m not quite sure whether we can take notes on kindle. But we can take notes on Nook (the e-book reader made by Barns and Noble.)

Despite the overzealous claim that kindle will replace traditional textbooks eventually, I prefer traditional textbooks.

* Reading a textbook is different from reading for fun. We have to take notes. With kindle, how to take notes? How to go back to the notes we made? How can an instructor tell the students which page to go since page numbers are not identified?
* We usually need a book for one course. After that, we can sell the book. But an e-book can’t be sold again.
* E-books are available for PCs and Macs. I doubt there will be a lot of students who want to buy a kindle since most students have laptops.
* When we do research, we might need to switch from books to books. With traditional books, this task is quite easy. But if we use kindle, we have to go through several steps to go to another book. And then after all of these steps, we will find that we only need to check one sentence from the book. After a short while, we have to use another book. Who will be patient enough with this complicated process?

To sum up, kindle is a good tool to employ when we read for fun, but I’m hesitant to use it to replace textbooks.

(Jason)At this point of time, I will not use Kindle as a substitute for textbooks, because it is very inconvenient for me to highlight paragraphs, write down note, and locate information, and so on. Textbook is not limited to read, and I always draw and write lot of things on it for future references. Since Kindle is not touchable, users are not allowed to easily making notes on it. Even for the new Kindle which includes the function like taking note, I would also concern about the quality, usability, and compatibility of those note files, where digital divide issue steps out. Moreover, the speed for switching page in Kindle is unacceptable based on my personal preferences. It is slower than reading from computer screen given the different hardware design. If I want to find out a definition of something I cannot clearly remember, I don’t know the keyword, and I don’t know the page number, in that situation flipping a real book would be much faster than search in Kindle. Although Amazon lowers the Kindle’s price to $299, I believe it is still too expensive. After one or two years, the competition in this market would be increased and the cost for hardware probably would be decreased, at that time, the price for e-book reader should be more rational. From a long term viewpoint, there is no significant benefit for education catch up with new technology that quick. In conclusion, I think we need to stick with real book at this time.

(Zaid) I had heard about Kindle from a long time especially when it was released with a ~500$ price. It made no sense at that time as one could easily buy a good laptop with the same price and use it for more than reading books. But with the enhanced features, improved quality and better price I think it is a product which definitely has a potential especially with book lovers.

Some of the good facts about the Kindle:

I see a lot of potential with kindle with travelers. It is light weight and thin as easy to carry as any other book. For longer trips one would not have to carry several big novels or other books apart from their luggage and use the kindle for as much as 1500 books.

The navigation’s are pretty simple and easy. It gives an impression that it is a book with adjusted screen gray scales.

It also looks certainly tougher than a laptop in terms of handling and usage. The openings in a hardware device which can be a threat in harsh travelling conditions against dust and water are less. With less moving parts and buttons, the chances that the kindle will be spoilt in comparison to a netbook or any other sleek laptop which can save the same purpose are less

Amazon has carefully considered the psychological factors of general reading habits while designing the device as a replacement to traditional books. Hassle free features and basic navigation does not give an impression of a Hi-Tec device.

The book marking and highlighting is also good. It allows making notes as in text books, expanding its scope as replacement to school and college books as well.

Why Kindle does not meet expectations:

Although designed to imitate a book, Amazon has worked on keeping advanced features away from kindle so that it can easily be adapted by all readers as replacement of a book. However, most of the readers who have adapted to e-books have also adapted to technology and are spoilt by its luxuries. Reading is no different. If I were to use kindle as an eBook I would definitely want a search options, a copy-paste option as we well as other features offered by software’s in the market like Adobe acrobat reader. The lack of advanced features prevents its use in research as well as academic purposes.

The supporting upload format to kindle is an issue. Although it supports famous formats like text, Doc . and PDF, eBooks may be published in different formats by different publishing groups. Conversion can be a hassle to the audience Amazon is targeting towards as it involves technical knowledge to convert and upload.

A book can be shared but Kindle cannot be shared with friends or in book clubs.

It does not have Wi-Fi and requires a computer to upload a book. If I am carrying a laptop to upload books to kindle I rather just carry a laptop and read it directly from it. Especially with the new generation Net books with touch screen, easy navigation controls for reading and media, rotatable screens and more battery power.

It is also overly priced when compared to a laptop which can serve multiple purposes or a MP4 player on a smaller scale.

To conclude the hardware and software used for Kindle could have better utilized the options of a book in a digital format. It could be used to expand its market with students and academicians with advanced feature of word processor and adobe reader. Kindle could be more effective with the option to customize and add features based on ones needs and reading habits. An option to add application (apps) just like the Apple I-Touch does along with WI-FI and better hardware for the same price could do the trick.

1. **Twitter**

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=407881&c=2>

<http://lowriderlibrarian.blogspot.com/2009/08/twitter-for-organizations.html>

<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=407984&c=1>

We watched the videos and had the following discussions:

(Jason) I agree with the opinion in the first article. Twitter is more or less a pickle which is tasty if people eat it with the other food, but it cannot be considered as a main entry which will be horrible for most of people.

The second article is a pretty good source as Twitter introduction and overview.

The third article owns a valid idea and pointed out one of the true value for Twitter that is sharing valuable information but telling people where are you and/or what are you doing. Also I would agree it is hard for an institution build up a system like Twitter to exchange information, especially Twitter is FREE for everyone. However, it is always a challenge for organization integrate Twitter into its corporate system regarding to the privacy issues, confidential issues and so on. So in the organizational level, I would suggest to make Twitter as a backup plan for emergency communication.

(Zaid) I honestly have never used twitter, perhaps I have never found the need for micro blog or broadcast a message which is as short as a text.

The articles pointed out are a good tutorial to twitter and its ideal utilization. The articles give an important and ideal use of twitter from the academician, philosophor or a professors point of view. However, each individual has different feild of interest as the third aricle points out and each individual is interseted in some thing different.

Some might find twitter effective only to refer to a good web resource or articles but some may be simply interested in what's going on with others lives(the popularity of popular reality TV shows is a proof of this).

I personally think that twitter was made popular by teenage networks, students and freinds who want to be connected with each other all the time, with tweets like, "I have a tennis match today afternoon" or " I am having lunch at Apple Bees". It's hype was publicized by the media and now wantingly or unwantingly intellectual crowd feels the need to keep up with another technology which may or may not be useful.

I would find twitter abosolutely of no use, If I have 100% Wi-Fi connectivity on my phone everywhere and anywhere. With growing telecommunication trend this has already been made possible in countries like India and China. If I a have cell phone connectivity I will aslo have internet connectivity. If I have internet connectivity then I have no reason why i should or should not contain myself to micro or macro blogging. Not to mention the SMS text charge you are entitled to for by the network for every tweet.

(May) We can make a good use of twitter in education in the following ways:

* Share thoughts with people in your field, and get input from others. We can write down a great idea that hit us at any moment. We can ask questions, and people who follow us might be able to answer the questions. What is more important is that when we get stuck, a tweet can generate input from others that will help us through the block.
* Twitter can be a useful way to share the links with us. In addition, we can keep the useful links and comments about the links at a place. Therefore, we know where to go when we need the links.
* Students can write down what they have learned in a week, which is a good way to make them think about what they have learned. After reading other people’s twits, students can make comments or ask questions.
* Some famous writers have their own twits. Students can follow those people, which will motivate students to read the work of the authors and ask questions.
* Instructors can ask students to do certain assignments on twitter to train students to write succinctly.

1. **Texting in Education**

<http://blogs.usatoday.com/oped/2009/06/txting-away-ur-education.html>

(Jason) This article shows that texting is undermining students’ ability to focus and opportunity to learn. Many students feel they can’t live without texting. In addition, texting has its own language, which will negatively affect students’ writing. In the end, the author suggests that parents should diable the text messaging function of their kids’ cellphones and the students who refuse to hand out their cellphones to teachers should be punished.

<http://www.160characters.org/documents/SocialEffectsOfTextMessaging.pdf>

(May) The author developed an online questionnaire including multiple-choice, scalar and open-field questions to gather information on mobile phone ownership and usage and aspects of relationship development.

The research showed that there was a distinction between Texters and Talkers in the way they used their mobile phones and their underlying motivations. Texters seem to be more lonely and socially anxious and more likely to disclose the self in texts than face-to-face communication or voice call exchanges. Texters report to develop deeper relationship with the person they text most. Texting allows testers to present a new image that is different from the one familiar to their families and best friends.

<http://etec.hawaii.edu/proceedings/2009/Tomita.pdf>

(May) Students born after 1980 are referred to as digital natives because they were born into a world with technology. The majority are using text messaging, often referred to as Instant Messaging (IM), Short Messaging Service (SMS) or micro blogging.

The researcher investigated text messaging and its use in education. Critics think the short forms and jargons will destroy students’ ability to think, read and write. Also they think students need to practice writing full sentences and essays instead of instant messages. Other critics have concern regarding use of all lowercase letters, abbreviations, acronyms and emoticons.

But the proponents think texting messaging provides more exposure to the written word, which positively relates to greater literacy attainment. In addition, instant-messaging may have an indirect impact on writing by simply motivating students to write more, and to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Also some teachers are using instant messaging shorthand to help students spark ideas and creativity.

1. **Wifi Camera**

(Jason) It is very frustrated to make this camera working on my computer, and finally I gave up. I tried automatically search, and manually search by entering MAC address, but neither of them works. I don’t know whether it is the problem of my home network setting, or my computer. So if anyone figure out how to use this camera, please let me know.

1. **Sakai**

We explored Sakai hosted on rSmart for a while. The whole interface of Sakai is quite different than D2L, at least on rSmart version. As an Open Source Software, Sakai really focuses on collaboration and tailored its service to support this goal. For more information about Sakai, please visit this webpage (<http://sakaiproject.org/product-overview>) However, since we could not get the administrator privilege on that system, lots of things were not under our control. Therefore, we have to have more resources to support further exploration.

1. **Joomla and Drupal**

* <http://www.educause.edu/EDUCAUSE+Quarterly/EDUCAUSEQuarterlyMagazineVolum/ToolboxorTrapCourseManagementS/162865>
* <http://www.joomla.org/>
* <http://drupal.org/>
* <http://www.alledia.com/blog/general-cms-issues/joomla-and-drupal-which-one-is-right-for-you/>
* <http://www.topnotchthemes.com/blog/090224/drupal-vs-joomla-frank-comparison-ibm-consultant>
* <http://mydrupal.com/joomla-versus-drupal>

(Jason) I read all the articles and am inspired by the great functions and innovations provided by those open source software.

One big concern I have so far is how far we can do from this topic. It is no wonder Sakai, Joomla, and Drupal are very powerful CMS, and we can learn a lot of them from the tech-websites, forums, and blogs. However, without really hands on those platforms, without customizing modules in Joomla and Drupal and without practically implementing Sakai, I do not feel very confident and comfortable. In addition, I also doubt we are able to really handle those platforms in a short time given the time constraints and knowledge and skill gaps.

1. **ConnectYard**

(May) We can sign up with our Facebook or Twitter account. We can also create a new account. We need to put our real name and email address. Based on our profile, ConnectYard will suggest groups you can join. From the group, we can get help with our homework and get to know the school even before we go to the school.

Once we post a question to ConnectYard, we can receive feedbacks on our Facebook, Twitter, or via email or texting messages. This is the concept of ConnectYard.

We tried to connect ConnectYard to D2L, so that when students are doing discussions on D2L, other people can get the messages in the way they prefer----on Facebook, Twitter, cellphone or via email. We had several meetings with ConnectYard team, but we failed to achieve our goal. One possible problem is that our D2L is an old version. ConnectYard team is still working on it.

1. **Voicethread**

(May and Jason) We can embed PPT into it. Give the link to voicethread to students and they can watch the PPT at their own pace. Students can leave their comments immediately on the slides by typing or talking. All of the comments left by students will show up on the slides.

Some negative thoughts about Voice Thread:

* For a large group number usage, it may generate too many voice records, which would consume a lot of time to listen, to interpret and to communicate. People, like me, probably do not have enough patients to go over all of them.
* If I am interested in someone’s speech, it is not easy to take a note while he/she talked.
* If I want to look up some points mentioned in one of the records and I could not remember who said that, it will be really painful to review all the records.
* After reading the slides, if you want to go back to a specific slide, you have to go from the first slide.

1. **Googlewave**

We are doing more explorations about googlewave.